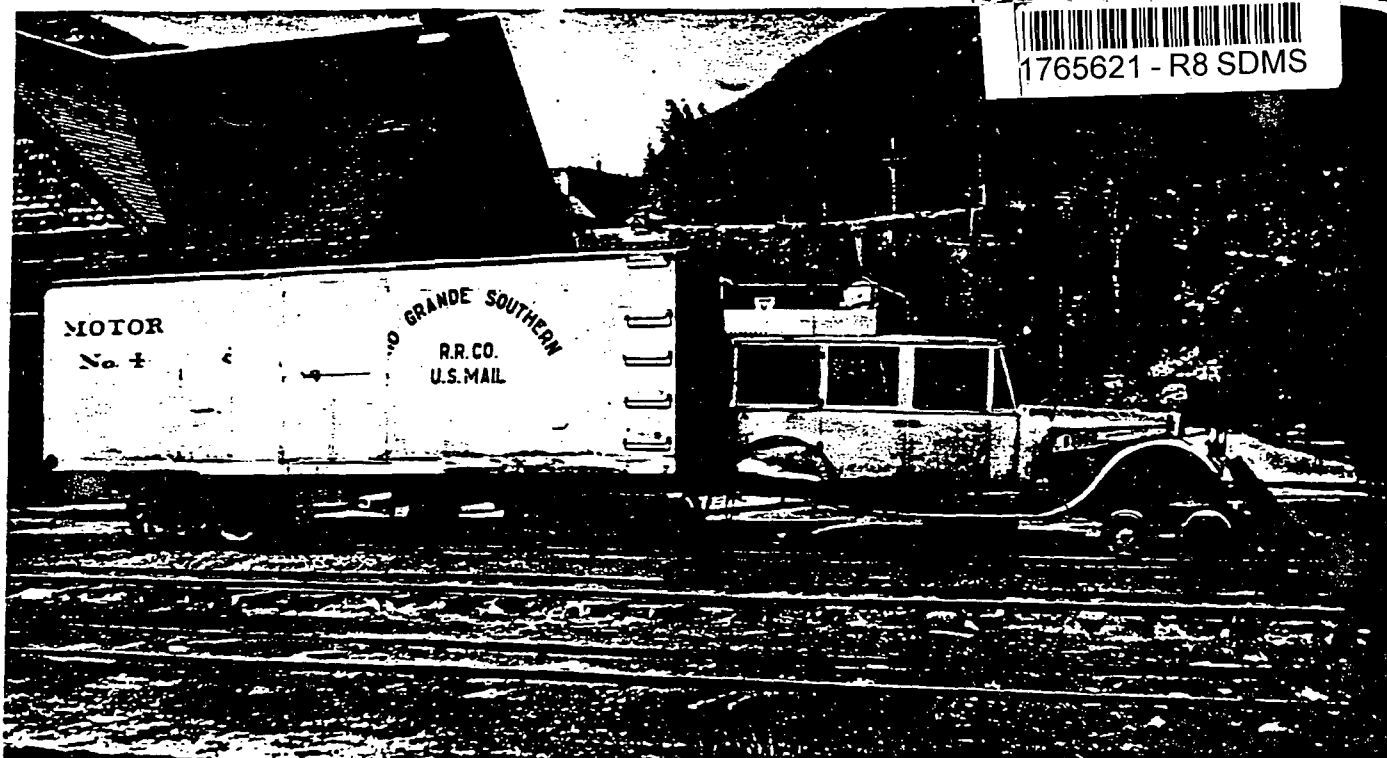


3416

A-0158

1765621 - R8 SDMS



BILL PLUNKETT COLLECTION

SOMETIME DURING 1939 an unknown photographer shot this picture of Galloping Goose No. 4. She was running as Train 371 (southbound) and had stopped at the Rico depot. This three-truck vehicle was constructed from a 1926 Pierce Arrow limousine. These second-hand Pierce Arrow vehicles came from a company in Colorado Springs that ran tours up Pikes Peak. Goose No. 4 had been put together from a Pierce Arrow body during the first half of 1933, using a Model "33,"

powered with a 33-horsepower Pierce Arrow motor—with a built-up freight-mail compartment at the rear of the limousine body. This is the way No. 4 looked two years before the U.S. entered World War II. Notice the split lettering for "RIO," which occurred when the freight doors were moved to the center of the compartment. During the summer months, the Geese often ran with their hood side panels raised (resting on the fenders), to provide additional cooling for the motors.

THE STORY OF RICO AND THE PIONEER MINING DISTRICT

A Chronology of Events

By William A. Graves

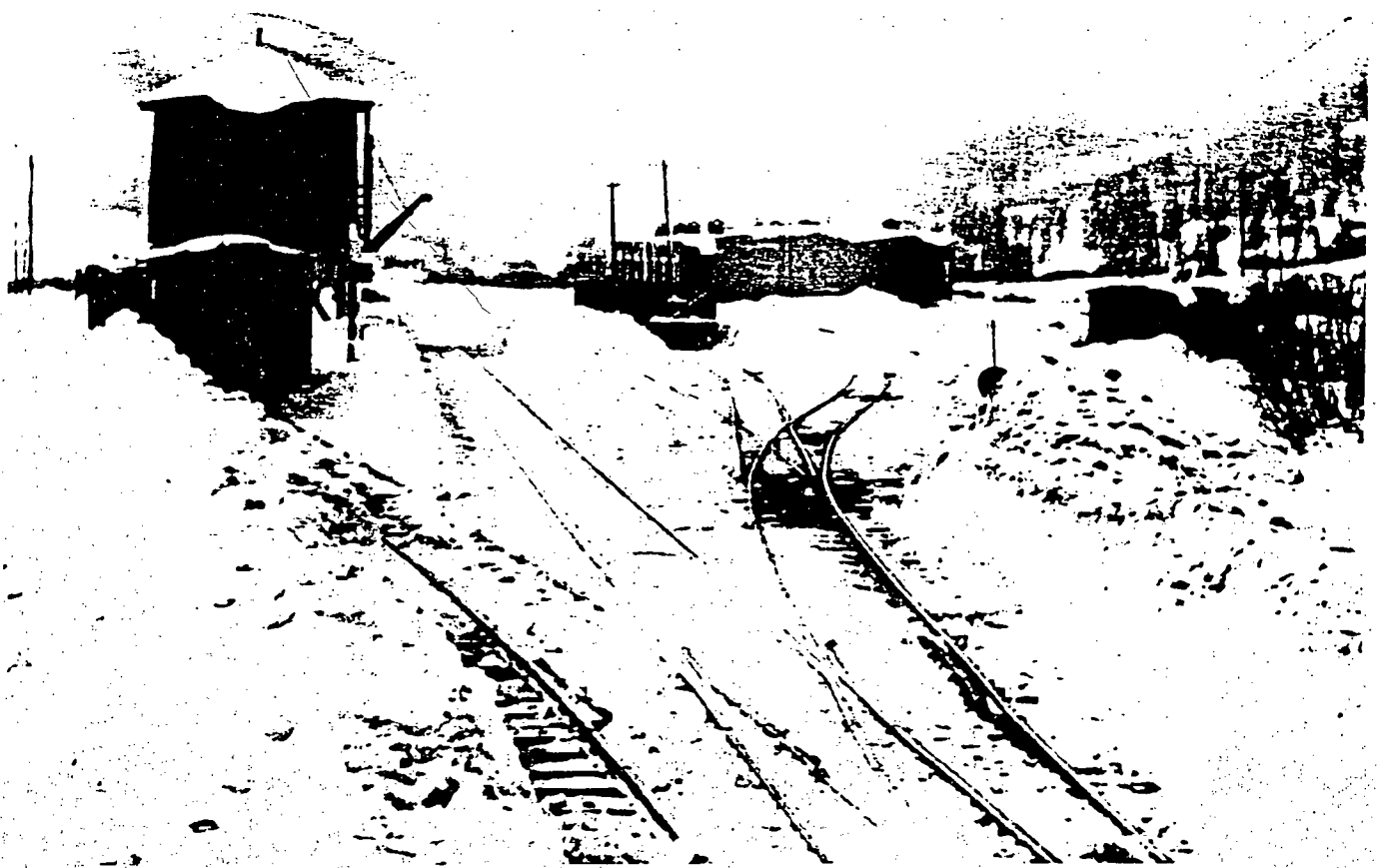
1937 - 1950

THIS CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS
begins the year after it ended in Volume V of this continuing series...

1937 The Rico-Argentine company was re-organized, with J. A. Hogle of Salt Lake City achieving financial control. C. G. Van Winkle was appointed as manager, and the company began operation at the Blaine Tunnel, on Silver Creek. Robert

Pellet developed heart trouble, which greatly restricted his day-to-day management of his mining property.

1938 The Rico-Argentine Mining Company began a very large expansion program, probably anticipating a high worldwide demand for metals, as many nations prepared for war. Over a period of several years, they increased their holdings in the Rico area, from about 240 acres to 3,000 acres, and they also acquired the mining rights to over 80 percent of the mines in the Rico district. The company also built a large multi-level flotation mill, with a capacity for producing 135 tons of ore per day. This new mill was about two miles up Silver Creek, and this building and several smaller structures, near the site, are still standing; however, they are on private property.



DIANE V. DAVIS COLLECTION

A WINTER STORM had blown across Rico, ca. 1939, dumping approximately two feet of snow. The RGS station grounds had already been plowed open, probably with the use of Plow-Flanger 02. Notice that hand work had been done with shovels and picks at some of the flangeways.

1939 Because of increasingly poor health, Robert Pellet had to phase out his mining contract with the International Smelting Company.

1940 With many countries at war, or preparing for war, the world's demand for metals took a sharp increase. Ore production skyrocketed at Rico, and the town was in its fourth "boom cycle." This big increase of activity at the mines did not change the appearance of the town very much. New mining methods, as well as new equipment, had made mining so much more efficient that a large labor force was not needed. Rico's mines employed 200 to 250 men, and the official 1940 census reported that the town's population was 388 people.

(Continued on Page 141)

From the Annals of the RGS...

THE YEAR OF 1940 IN REVIEW

*Based on the Receiver's Annual Report
Submitted to the Interstate Commerce
Commission's Bureau of Statistics*

By Gabe Bradford

THE FLAMES OF WAR were beginning to spread across the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa. Many people were coming to the realization that war was inevitable, and the United States would be right in the middle of it before long. The demand for production of war-related items and raw materials associated with these items had begun in earnest. Once again in the Colorado Rockies, the zinc, tin, vanadium, coal, coke, molybdenum and other more exotic minerals needed to win the war were in demand. With increased demand came increases in the prices offered for these minerals that translated into greater production and welcome employment.



MORRIS W. ABBOTT PHOTO - WILLIAM R. JONES COLLECTION

DURING AUGUST of 1942 the north end of the Rico yard was photographed by Morris W. Abbott, a railfan from the East. The RGS water tank was unobstructed from this angle (at this particular time). A string of high-side gondolas had been left on the No. 2 passing siding at

Rico, west of the depot. This was officially named Track No. 72, 960 feet long. The former Bridge & Building Department cars had become lineside structures years ago, in view at the left, next to the old RPO car body in use by the yardmaster. The freight room of the depot is at the far right.

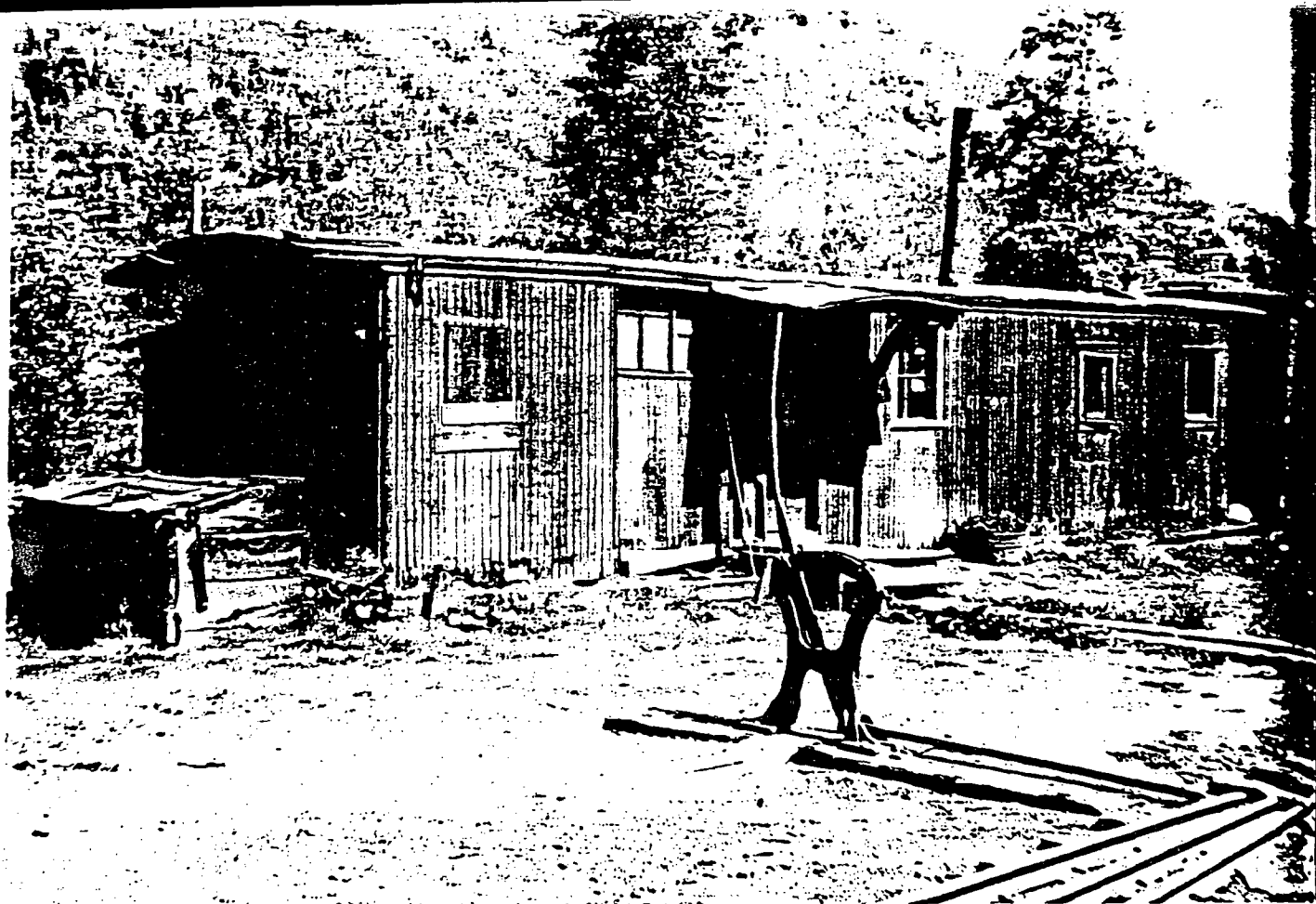
1941 The Rico-Argentine company acquired the International Smelting Company's properties, which included the Atlantic Cable and Shamrock mines, as well as the Mantz Avenue mill site. Ore production continued to increase in 1941.

1942 The United States was still recovering from the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, and the entire Nation was frantically gearing-up for all-out war. The government took over directing the operations of the railroads and prioritized them by their contribution to the war effort. However, the RGS was not considered essential, and legal proceedings for dismantling the line were scheduled. Only the intense-and-determined political efforts by Elizabeth Pellet kept the RGS

operating during World War II.

The Rico-Argentine company continued to expand its holdings, and the firm bought the Pellet's holdings on Newman Hill, which included the old Pro Patria and Enterprise mines. They also bought the St. Louis Tunnel property from the National Lead Company, a company that had formerly been known as the St. Louis Smelting & Refining Company when it came to Rico in 1922. Mr. Kline, a long-time manager for the StLS&R, and his wife, left Rico at this time. The Rico-Argentine also bought most of the town property and ran most of the services. Almost everyone in town was on the Rico-Argentine's payroll.

1943-1948 These were the all-time top mining years at Rico. The mines in the



STANLEY SCHWEDLER COLLECTION -
COURTESY OF CORONADO SCALE MODELS

THE YARDMASTER'S OFFICE still looked as though it was in reasonably good shape during the 1940's. Notice that the old car's number, 01707, was still visible through the paint. You can also see the "DEFENSE SUPPLIES CORPORATION - OWNER & LESSOR" notice just below the window (boarded up) at the left side of the car body.



MORRIS W. ABBOTT PHOTO - WILLIAM R. JONES COLLECTION

RGS CABOOSE No. 0404 was involved in an accident at Rico prior to November of 1943, when a car of ore crashed into the end of the caboose. The boxcar being switched had bad-order brakes and should not have been in service. This was the result of that error in judgment. The wreck damaged both ends of No. 0404, and the hack had to be hauled to Ridgway on a flatcar for repair, where it was resting when this picture was taken. Caboose 0404 is now on display at the Colorado Railroad Museum in Golden.

Rico district, headed by the Rico-Argentine, produced more than \$1-million worth of metals every year, and over \$9-million worth during this six-year period. Over half of the value was in zinc, a key wartime metal. Because of the manpower shortage during World War II, many Navajo miners from the Four Corners area—where the borders of Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico come together—were employed by the Rico-Argentine. And these men were reported to be very good workers. The Navajos were an easily recognized minority, and they tended to keep to themselves, away from the town's activities. Although there was a non-discrimination policy, the Navajos socialized very little with other town residents. Rico had the usual social organizations, typical of small, isolated towns of that time, such as the Moose, Odd Fellows and Masonic lodges, the Rico Volunteer Fire Department, the La-


dies Aid Society and the Busy Bees Sewing Club.

Rico did not operate as a traditional company town, but the Rico-Argentine Mining Company owned most of the town. Most of the residents were on the company's payroll, and most of the town's officers were Rico-Argentine employees, as well. The company did work around the town, and it treated the town and company employees somewhat as a benevolent parent. For example, the grocery store and the automobile garage were private businesses, but the Rico-Argentine guaranteed payment of their employee's accounts. The company also operated a movie theater on a non-profit basis, and it negotiated with a medical doctor from Telluride or Dolores to visit Rico weekly to care for their employee's needs. Rico's population ranged from 400 to 600 people. C. T. Van Winkle, the president of the Rico-Argentine, retired at the end of this period, in 1948.

The Pro Patria mill was completely shut down in 1948.

1944 Dove Creek was a rapidly growing town, which offered a more-accessible location than Rico. By 1944, its population had become larger than Rico's, and in a general county-wide election, the voters chose to move the Dolores County seat to Dove Creek, where it remains today. (It should be noted that the town of Dolores is in Montezuma County—not in Dolores County.)

1949 The wartime demand for metals was over by 1949, and the catch-up production of all kinds of goods for peacetime use was over. Ore production in the Rico area was reduced by more than half, and 150 men were laid off at the Rico-Argentine. Sherman B. Hinckley, the new president of the Rico-Argentine company, closed down mining operations, including the Silver Creek mill, in May of 1949. Regrettably, Robert Pellet, who had kept the Rico mines active during the 1930's, was injured in an automobile accident on November 10, 1949. Betty was at the wheel because of her husband's heart trouble and failing health, and their car skidded on an icy section of Highway 145 on Montelores Hill, about six miles south of Rico. Betty was not badly hurt



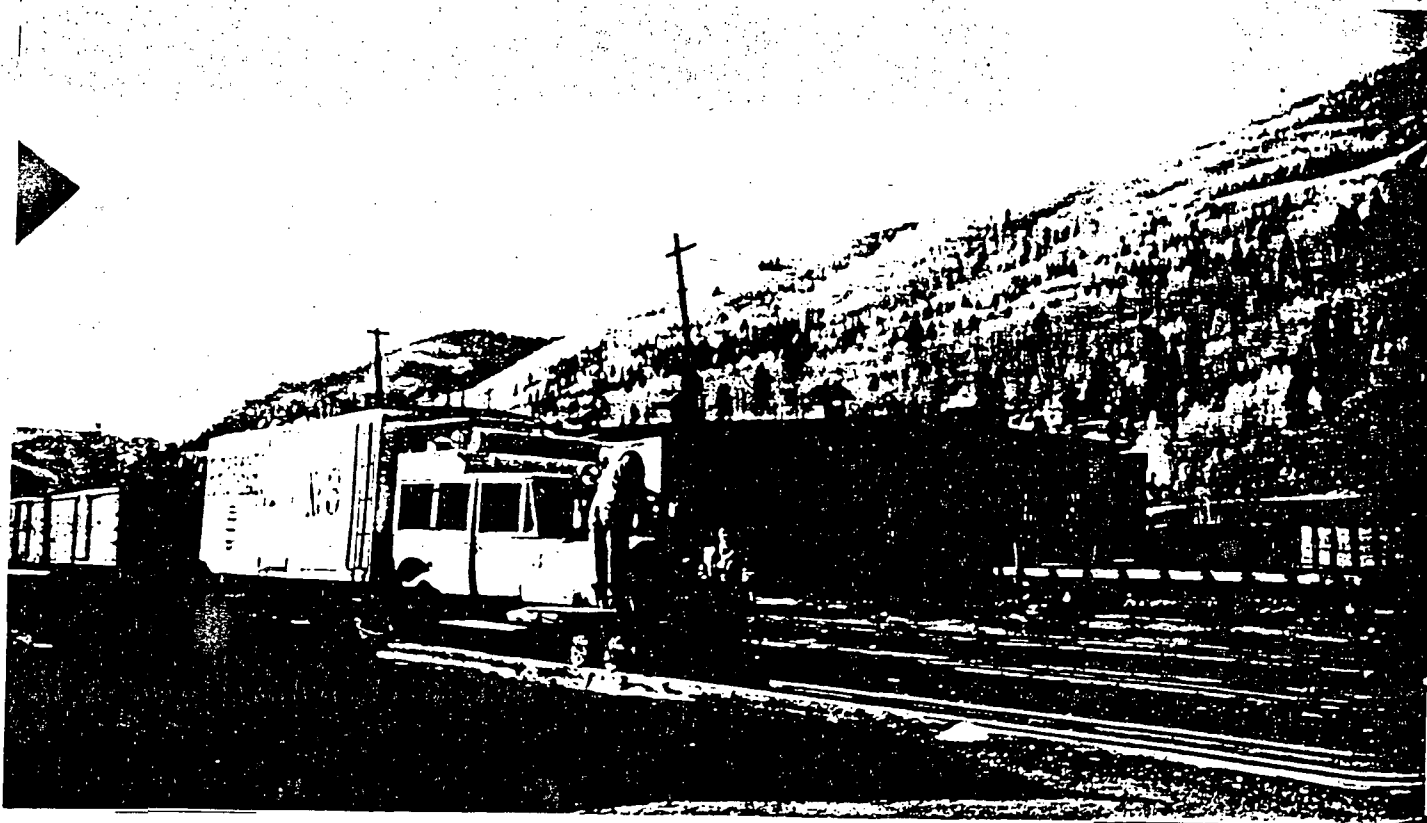
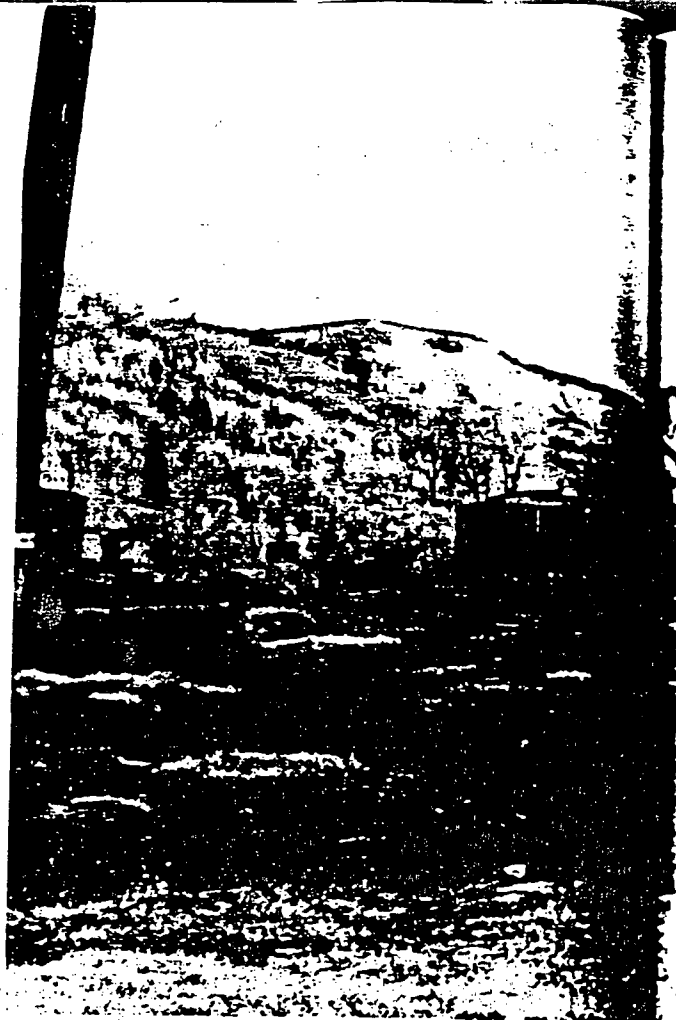
track in the foreground was for the weighing scale, while the track at the far left was the south end of the house track. It had loaded boxcars spotted on it, ready to be picked up. The old harp switchstand, at the right, was set in the derail position, protecting the main track from runaways.

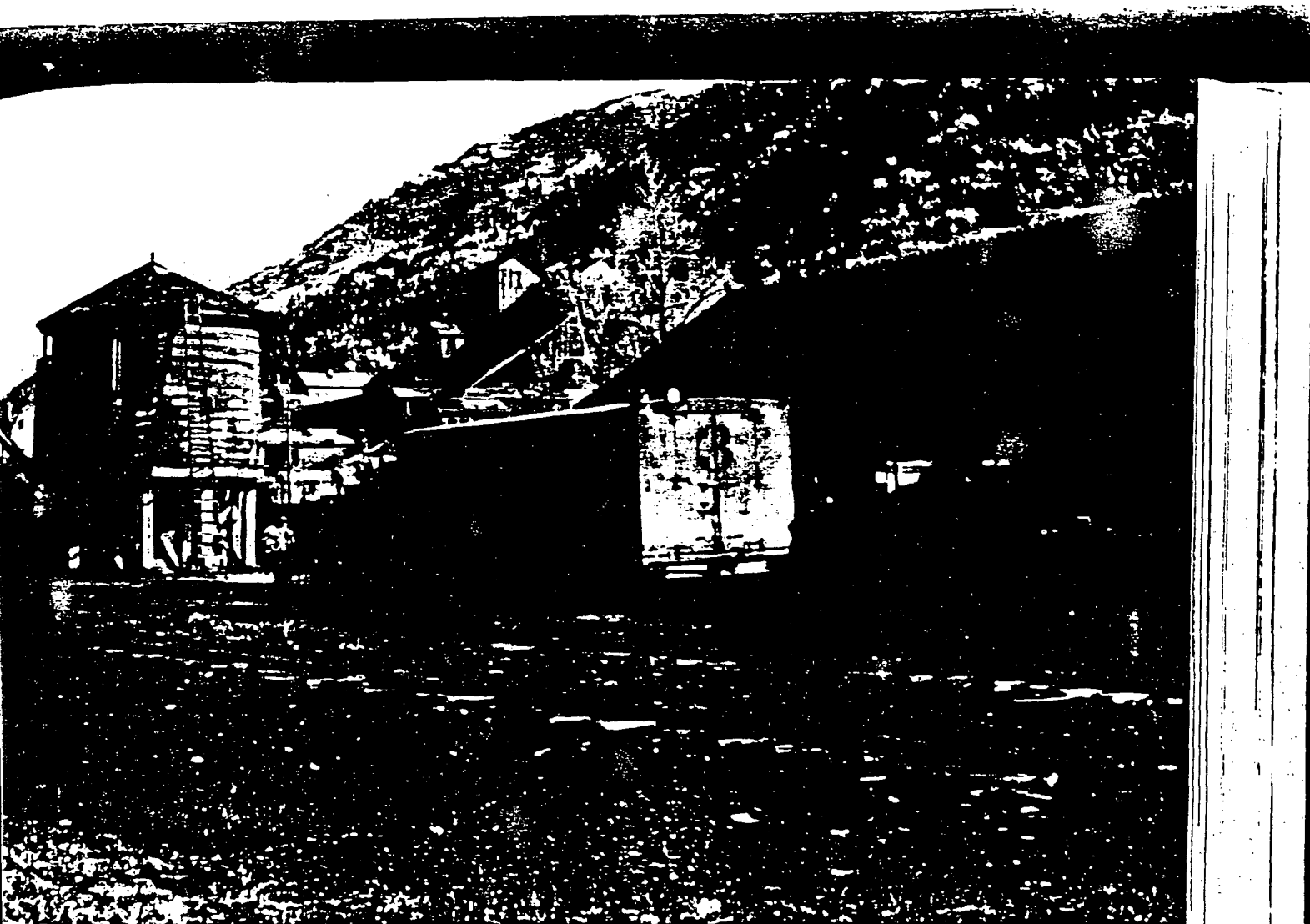
ROBERT W. RICHARDSON PHOTOS -
DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY, WESTERN HISTORY DEPARTMENT

ROBERT W. RICHARDSON arrived at Durango aboard the D&RGW's narrow-gauge named train, the "San Juan," for a ride over the RGS line. This was on October 10, 1945, and Bob had just been discharged from service in the U.S. Army, near the end of World War II. He had decided to "take in" the narrow-gauge lines out in Colorado. On October 11, Bob rode in the mail truck to the little farm-ranch town of Dolores. After arriving in this sleepy community, he found nothing to do except wait for a doubleheaded Durango-to-Dolores freight train, which did not arrive in Dolores until after dark. So, Bob was unable to shoot any photographs of this run. Bob stayed overnight in Dolores, and on October 12 he rode the northbound Galloping Goose, leaving Dolores at 7:30 a.m. bound for Rico. There, he shot this picture of the "train" he had been riding on, Goose No. 3, running as Train 372. L-C-L freight was either being loaded out of, or into, the silver railbus at the Rico depot. The Chevrolet truck of ca. 1938 vintage was lettered "Red Glow Coal," and it was parked between the Goose and freight dock of the depot.

and was able to scramble back up to the road, but Bob was trapped in the wreckage. After some time, he was rescued and taken to the hospital at Cortez. Following a five-day stay, he was able to return to his home in Rico.

1950. One of the dates on Robert Pellet's tombstone in Rico is correct; however,





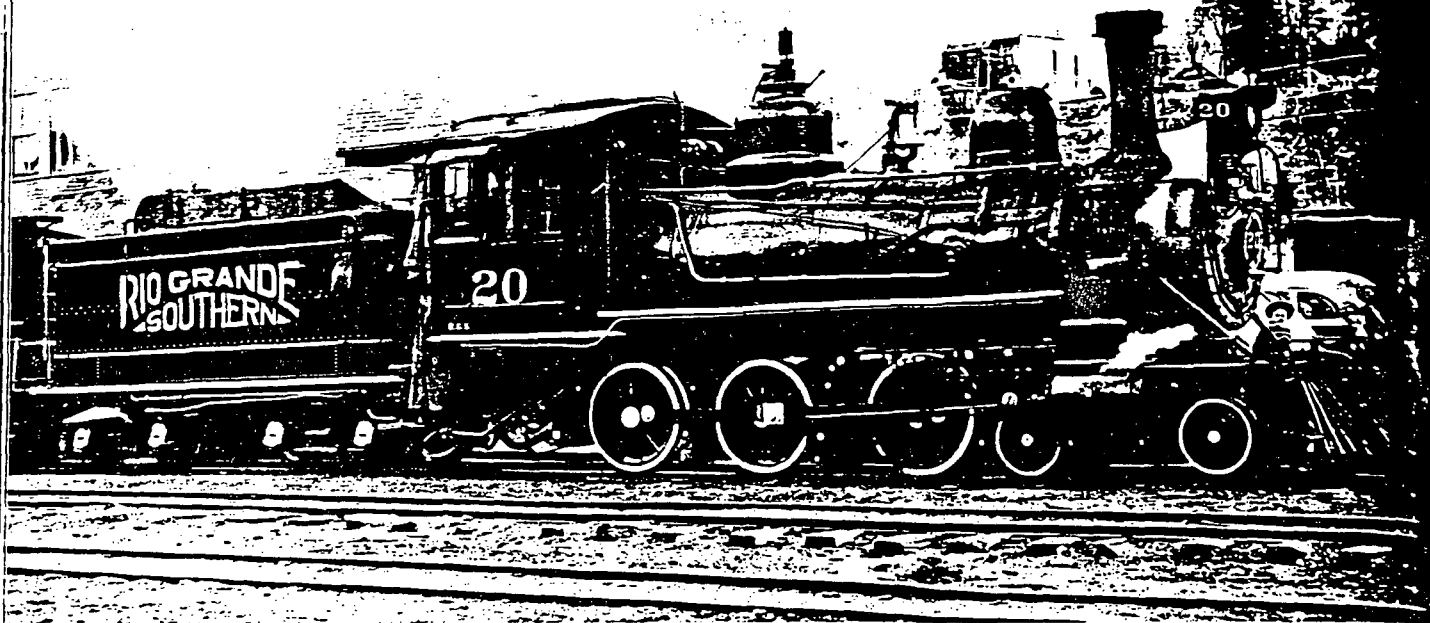
BEFORE PULLING OUT of Rico on October 12, 1945, Jimmy Cooper poured water into the radiator of RGS Galloping Goose No. 3. Running as northbound Train 372, the railbus would soon be tackling the 3.0-percent grade to Lizard Head Pass. Goose No. 3 departed from Rico at 10:22 a.m. with four paying passengers. While waiting at Lizard Head Pass for the freight train to arrive, it began to snow very hard, and Bob was unable to take any pictures, as the big flakes fell thick and fast. Soon the ground was completely covered, and Bob became concerned about being afoot in this remote area, in the middle of a snowstorm. However, the northbound freight train finally arrived, and Bob boarded the caboose for a

ride down to Vance Junction to await the arrival of the daily southbound Goose, Train 371. He had a rather long wait, as the railbus scheduled out of Ridgway southbound had mechanical trouble, and when Goose No. 3 arrived in Ridgway, she was serviced and sent back southward. Bob boarded the Goose when she arrived at Vance Junction hours behind schedule, with Motorman Henry Wolford at the controls. He and Bob had a nice chat as the little railbus rocked and rolled through the snow-covered mountains on the run downgrade to Rico. Here, Bob stepped down from No. 3 to spend the night in a hotel, while Henry Wolford herded the Goose on to Dolores, so she would be ready for her northbound run on October 13.

the other one is not. Bob Pellet was born in Watkins Glen, New York, on December 2, 1872, but he did not die in 1949, as shown on the tombstone. He was very much alive at that time; however, he experienced another more serious car accident on January 17, 1950. The accident occurred at an icy spot on U.S. Highway 160, about four miles west of Durango.

The car that Betty was driving collided with a truck loaded with coal. Both Betty and Bob were seriously injured. She suffered broken ribs, and he went into severe shock. Both of them required lengthy stays in Durango's Mercy Hospital. On March 17, the front page of The Dolores Star newspaper reported that

(Continued on Page 164)



RICHARD H. KINDIG PHOTO

A BEAUTIFUL BROADSIDE view of Engine 20 was taken before her departure for Dolores on May 30, 1947. This run was made for a Rocky Mountain Railroad Club special, and 4-6-0 No. 20 had been freshly painted and lettered for this excursion. (The boiler was painted dark green, while the smokebox was graphite silver, and the lettering was painted in white. At the same time, the trim was neatly done in silver.) Unfortunately, this attractive Ten-wheeler developed leaky flues as she was climbing the grade between Ridgway and Dallas Divide. So, when the club's excursionists boarded the train the following morning, they found leased Denver & Rio Grande Western 2-8-0 No. 319 in charge of their return trip to Ridgway.

BILL PLUNKETT COLLECTION

THE ENGINEER'S SIDE of D&RGW No. 319 was photographed while her tender was being filled from Rico's water tank on the morning of May 31, 1947. Apparently, engines had dumped their ashes here, piled up to the left of No. 319. This was the Rocky Mountain Railroad Club's northbound special, en route from Dolores. The train had departed from Ridgway on the previous morning, with RGS No. 20 as the motive power.

ON THE MORNING of May 31, 1947, the Rocky Mountain Railroad Club excursion train left Dolores, with leased D&RGW engine No. 319 on the point. Here, No. 319, an ex-Florence & Cripple Creek 2-8-0, had just "tanked-up" at the Rico water tank, and was about to depart for Ridgway.

RICHARD H. KINDIG PHOTO - ELMORE FREDERICK COLLECTION

Robert Pellet died on March 12, 1950, at a Denver hospital.

With Bob's death, Rico lost one of its strongest supporters—a man who did everything he could to maintain a high level of employment for mining operations and the RGS railroad. Following his death, Betty Pellet lived another 26 years as a

widow—an extremely active widow who worked hard to improve her community.

The Rico-Argentine mining enterprise started operating again on a small scale, with about 50 men. However, the town's population was down to 212 people. The Pro Patria mill may have operated for a short time.

1950

THE STORY OF RICO AND THE PIONEER MINING DISTRICT

A Chronology of Events

By William A. Graves

— 1951 —

THIS CHRONOLOGY about Rico continues from 1950...

1951 Car-loadings on the RGS were down to one-third of their 1948 levels. Both the financial condition and the physical condition of the RGS were desperately poor. When the RGS sent notices of increases in freight rates to its shippers, the Telluride Mines and the Rico-Argentine began to ship their ore-concentrates by highway trucks. This was a fatal blow for the RGS. These two mines were the biggest customers, and the RGS management stated that the two mining companies had generated two-thirds of the RGS revenue in 1950. Railroad operations were cut back even further than before. And the last northbound freight train departed from Rico on November 26, 1951, while the last southbound freight train departed from Rico three days later. The Federal court gave the railroad permission to suspend operations on the entire line on December 17, 1951.

The Rico-Argentine Mining Company bought the freight yards and buildings of the RGS at Rico. Some of the rail was salvaged and was used underground at the St. Louis, Argentine and Mountain Springs mines, and above ground at the acid-processing plant.

RIO GRANDE SOUTHERN



DONALD DUKE PHOTO - PUBLISHER OF GOLDEN WEST BOOKS

GALLOPING GOOSE No. 4 was being loaded with L-C-L (less-than-carload lot) freight and express shipments at the Rico depot, during the winter of 1948. No. 4 was the first Goose to receive a Wayne schoolbus body—in 1946—having already received a rebuilt (war-surplus) GMC truck motor during 1946. Donald Duke reported the following: "Ernie Peyton and I took the train from Colorado Springs during the spring recess [from college] and arrived in Alamosa in the morn-

THE STORY OF RICO AND THE PIONEER MINING DISTRICT

A Chronology of Events

By William A. Graves

1951 - 1997



No. 6

The Chronology of Events Continues...

1951-1956 As a result of the Korean hostilities, the early 1950's saw a sharp increase in the demand for metals. Starting in 1951, Dolores County enjoyed six years of booming prosperity. Between \$1-million and \$2-million worth of ore was produced every year. As the "Ore-Production Table" shows (on Page 227), the value of the ore mined during the 1950's was greater than that of the 1890's boom, and second only to that of the 1940's. In addition to ore production in the 1950's, another boom was taking place in south-western Colorado. A young uranium industry was growing rapidly, and it needed large quantities of sulfuric acid. The Rico-Argentine mine was very capable of supplying this acid at a competitive price.

DR. A. G. CHIONE PHOTO

THE FIRST SWITCH leading into the south end of the Rico station grounds appears in this view, taken during the spring of 1952, after the RGS had been abandoned. This turnout served the scale track and house track, which ran along the east side of the depot—and it had been used for loading ore into boxcars. With the Dolores River so close to the main track and yard, it is a wonder that there were not more washouts caused by high water during spring runoffs.

OPEN
BY
RICO-ARGENTINE

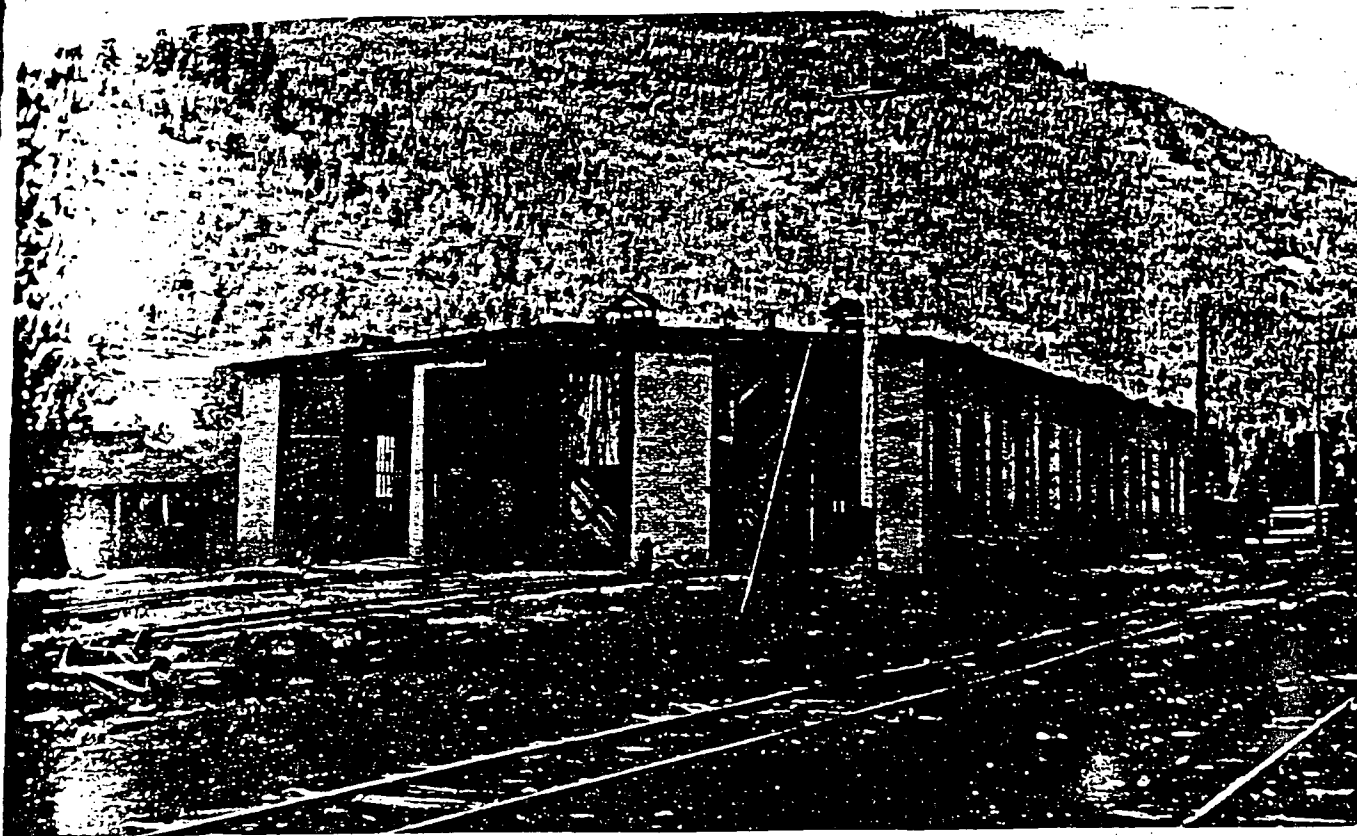
DR. A. G. CHIONE PHOTO

DURING THE SPRING of 1952, Dr. A. G. Chione, took a trip over what had been the narrow-gauge RGS line, taking photographs of railroad buildings before the scrappers arrived to destroy everything. This unobstructed view of the Rico station grounds was taken as he looked toward the north. Only one lead track from the south connected with the one of the three tracks inside the enginehouse. The old harp switchstand controlled the derail at the left, which protected the siding below from runaways. The old wooden racks at the right once stored bridge timbers—up off the ground—for use by the Bridge & Building Department for trestle repair. The track running beside the timber-storage racks was once used for Rico's track scale.

The St. Louis Tunnel was reopened to produce pyrite, about half iron and half sulphur. This tunnel was on C.H.C. Hill, a location near the base of Telescope Mountain. This pyrite was mined at a site known as the Mountain Springs mine, and it was trucked a short distance to an acid-processing plant. This plant was designed by the Monsanto Chemical Company, and it was constructed by the Leonard Company of Chicago in 1954. The cost of the plant was \$1.5 million. It was located near the portal of the St. Louis Tunnel, and it usually operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Daily production was about 125 tons, and the acid sold for about \$20 per ton. The Union Carbide Company and the Vanadium Company of America became good customers. The acid was trucked to Durango, Grand Junction and other mill sites in southwestern Colorado.

This new prosperity increased the town's population to about 400 people, and it created another housing shortage. The Rico-Argentine operation developed a trailer park and provided some additional housing for employees. A new elementary school building was constructed in 1953.





VAUGHAN JONES PHOTO - RICHARD A. RONZIO COLLECTION

RICO'S ENGINEHOUSE originally was used as a facility with three tracks that ran through the building and connected with the main tracks at each end of the yard. This enginehouse was built so it was long enough to hold two locomotives

on each of the three run-through tracks. This picture was taken after the Rio Grande Southern had been abandoned, and it shows the window and door arrangements on the east wall of the wooden sandhouse.

Older students went to school in Dolores. Commercial businesses in Rico consisted of a large general store, two cafes and bars, a hotel, a movie theater, a repair garage, some Colorado State Highway Department facilities, a mining office, which also accommodated the town's telephone service, and several other services.

1958 The acid plant continued to produce well, but the Silver Creek mill was closed, and for the first year since 1932, the Pioneer Mining District failed to ship any ore.

1959 O. L. Jahnke was appointed as the manager of the Rico-Argentine operation at Rico, a position held for many years.

1959-1963 The Rico-Argentine bounced back, and it produced enough ore to run the Silver Creek mill at 80- to 85-percent

capacity most of the time. However, the uranium industry began to collapse toward the end of this period, and sulfuric-acid production was cut back.

Construction began on an improved hard-surface road, Colorado Highway 145, which goes through Rico on the town's main street, Glasgow Avenue. Much of this improved highway was relocated on the old RGS railroad grade.

1964 The Rico-Argentine's sulfuric-acid plant was put on standby in October of 1964, and the plant was completely closed three years later.

1965 An old mine, the Payroll Mine, was reopened by the Mountain States Mining Company, and it was active for about two years.

1967 The upgrading of Highway 145 was

(Continued on Page 226)



TWO VIEWS: DR. A. G. CHIONE PHOTOS -
FORT LEWIS COLLEGE, CENTER OF SOUTHWEST STUDIES

DR. A. G. CHIONE took two pictures of the Rico yard in 1952—reproduced on this and the following page—wherein the two picture frames together produce this broad sweep of the yard. The scene was north of the Rico depot and enginehouse. At the far left, the depot, a tool shed, section-car shed and water tank appear to the east

of the main track. These two pictures clearly show the alignment of the mainline and yard tracks, as well as the leads and spur tracks on the north side of the enginehouse. A coal shed was still positioned beside the spur track, at the far right. The old harp-type switchstand aligned the rails for access to the enginehouse service area.

completed, and Rico finally had an asphalted, paved highway.

1969–1975 A mine near Rico, called the Silver Clad Mine, was worked between 1969 and 1975. Ore from the Silver Clad was trucked to the Silver Bell mill at Ophir Loop for processing. (See Page 467 of Volume III in this series for more details.)

1977 The Rico-Argentine company suspended all mining operations during the early part of 1977. The mining that had been the reason for the town's creation and existence came to an end after 100 years of "boom-and-bust" cycles.

1980 By this time, Rico was almost deserted. The 1980 census showed a population of only 76 people in the old mining town.

1997 As this book is being published, Rico is being "discovered" again. Enough

tourists visit Rico each year to help support a bar and cafe, a general store (with gasoline pumps for automobiles), a hotel and a motel. The declining population of the 1980's has reversed itself, and the town has grown back to about 125 people. This historic town, with its Old West charm, situated in the beautiful Dolores River Valley, is becoming known as a very desirable place to live (and visit), without many of society's urban problems. Life is a little slower in Rico, and the residents seem to have adjusted their pace to the natural rhythm of their surroundings.

As a footnote, it has been reported that **THE NEW YORK TIMES** published a story in August of 1996, stating that "investors" had bought most of Rico "...for development." Supposedly, the investors spent \$4 million for their purchases.